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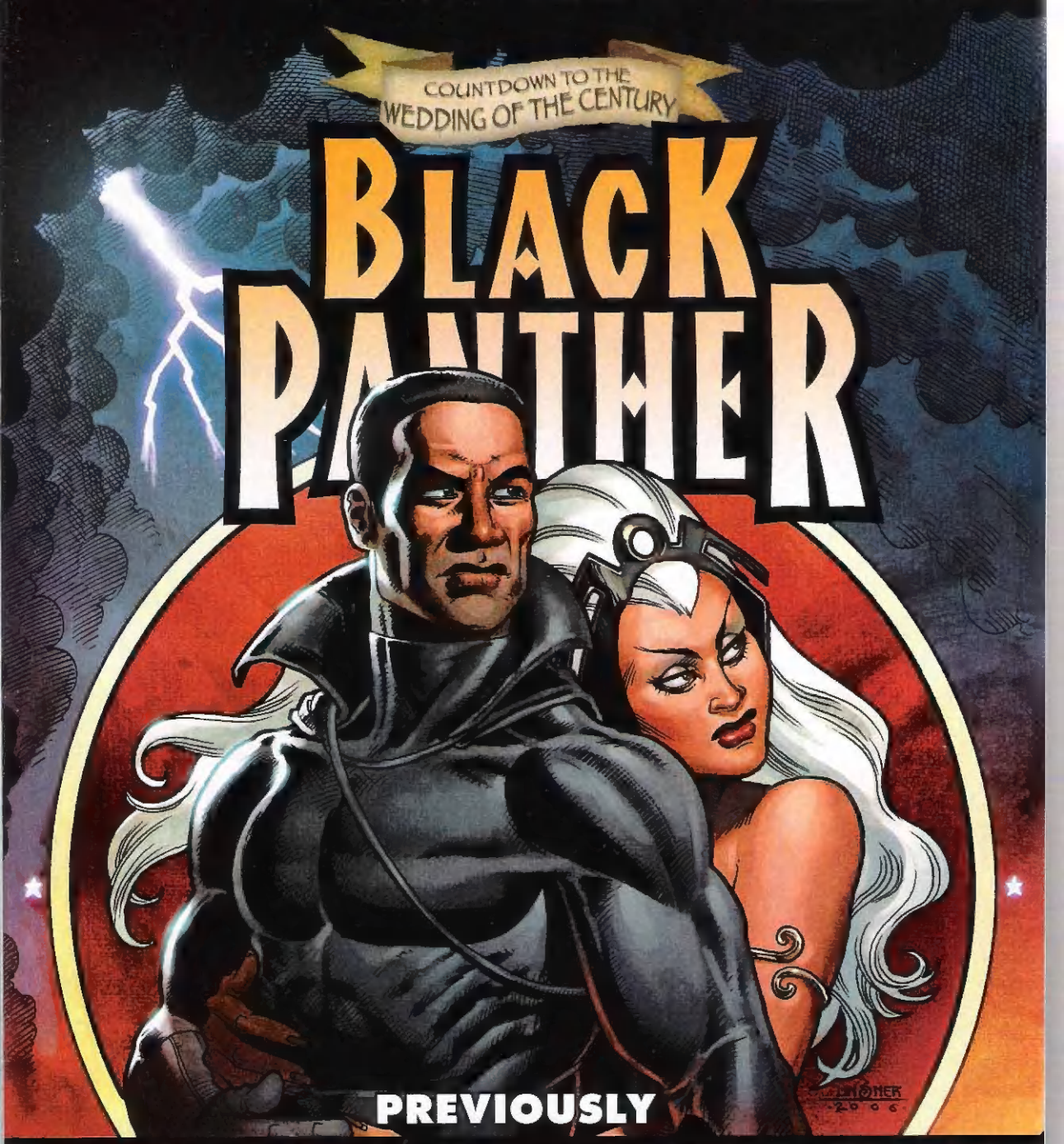

There are some places you just don't mess with. Since the dawn of time, that African warrior nation has been sending would-be conquerors home in body bags. While the rest of Africa got carved up like a Christmas turkey by the rest of the world, Wakanda's cultural evolution has gone unchecked for centuries, unfettered by the yoke of colonization. The result: a high-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise that makes the rest of the world seem primitive by comparison.

Ruling over all of this is the Black Panther.

The Black Panther is more than just the embodiment of a warrior cult that's served as Wakanda's religious, political and military head since its inception. The Black Panther is the embodiment of the ideals of a people. Anyone who'd dare to make a move on Wakanda must go through him.

Now, the Panther is on the verge of fulfilling one of his duties as king: taking a queen. He has announced his engagement to Storm of the X-Men—a woman with whom he shares much love and history. The happy couple prepares for their union, unaware that conflict abroad and dark intentions at home may overshadow their joyous occasion...

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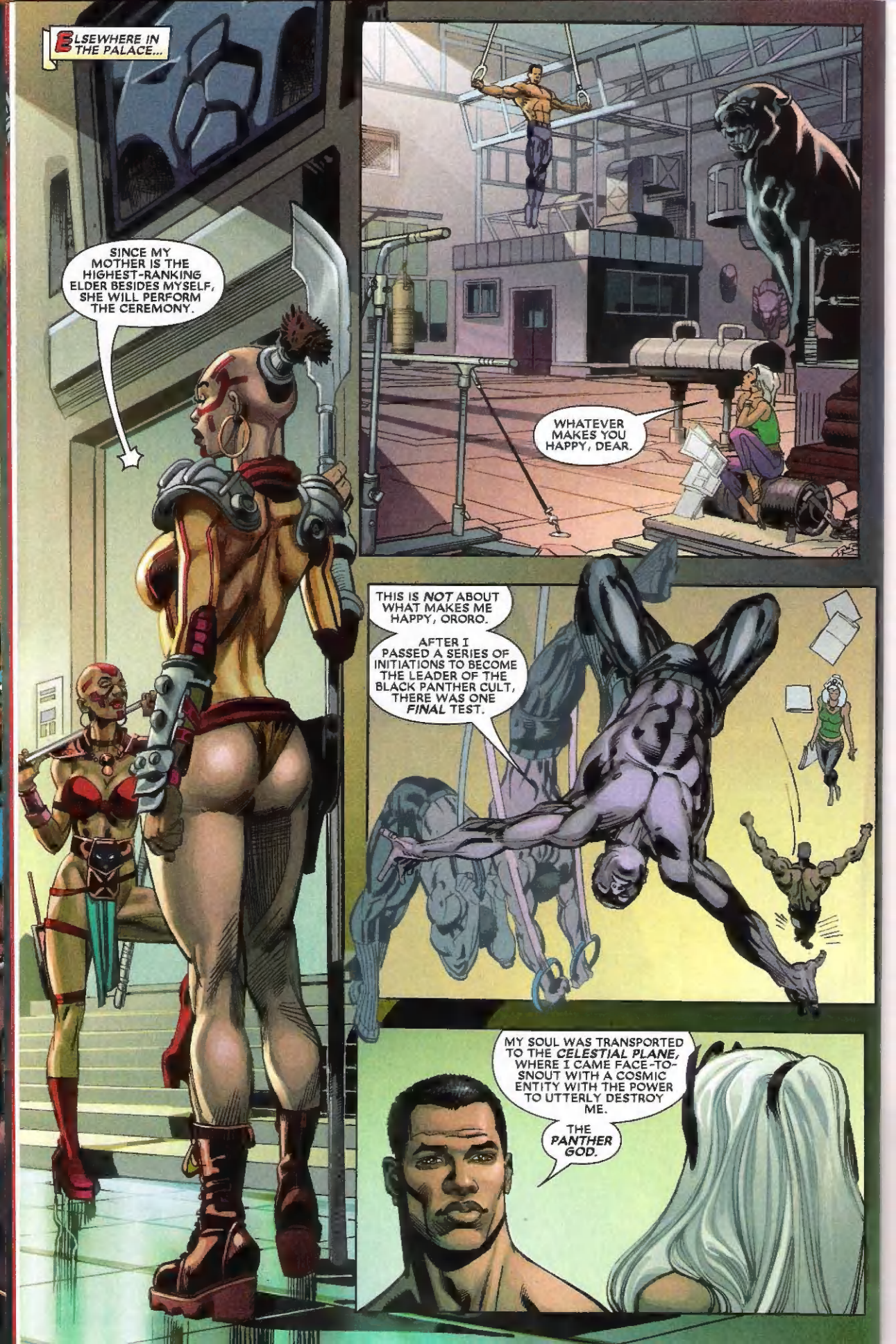
HI, THIS IS TOURÉ--
--AND THIS IS ANANDA--
--AND WE'RE COMING TO YOU LIVE FROM WAKANDA, WHERE BET IS COVERING THE WEDDING OF THE CENTURY!
BET
ORORO MUNROE, AN AFRICAN PRINCESS TURNED LEADER OF THE WELL-KNOWN MUTANT SUPER HERO GROUP THE X-MEN--
--IS GOING TO MARRY KING T'CHALLA, RULER OF THE AFRICAN NATION OF WAKANDA, BUT BETTER KNOWN TO MOST AMERICANS AS THE BLACK PANTHER.
FORGET HILLARY AND BILL. FORGET REED AND SUE. THIS IS THE NEW ULTIMATE POWER COUPLE.
WHY SO, TOURÉ?
T'CHALLA IS THE KING OF ONE OF THE MOST TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED COUNTRIES ON EARTH, A LAND OVERFLOWING WITH NATURAL RESOURCES--LIKE VIBRANIUM, AN ULTRA-PRECIOUS METAL THAT CAN'T BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE ON EARTH.
SO EXACTLY HOW MUCH CHEESE ARE WE TALKING HERE?
WE'VE HAD A RESEARCH TEAM FROM BLACK ENTERPRISE ON IT FOR A WEEK, AND THEY KEEP BUSTING CALCULATORS.
GOT IT.
BUT IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY. THEY'RE SUPER HEROES!
T'CHALLA IS THE WORLD'S HIGHEST-PROFILE BLACK SUPER HERO.
STORM IS WORSHIPPED AS A GODDESS IN MANY PARTS OF AFRICA. SHE CAN END A DROUGHT AT THE SNAP OF HER FINGERS.
AND WITH FRIENDS LIKE REED RICHARDS, TONY STARK, PRINCE NAMOR AND CAPTAIN AMERICA, IT'S HARD TO FIND A COUPLE WITH MORE JUICE IN THE SUPER HERO COMMUNITY.
BUT THOSE FRIENDSHIPS ARE ABOUT TO BE PUT TO THE TEST TODAY.
WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S INSISTENCE OF REGISTRATION OF ALL SUPER-POWERED BEINGS CAUSING A DEEP RIFT BETWEEN EVEN THE CLOSEST OF ALLIES IN THE CAPED COMMUNITY, THE QUESTION IS: WHO IS GOING TO SHOW UP TODAY? AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY...

"...WILL THEY *BEHAVE?*"
...*NEVER* WOULD'VE FIGURED YOU--OF ALL PEOPLE--WOULD THROW IN WITH STARK'S PRO-REGISTRATION POSSE, BUT HEY, YOU *ARE* COMMITTED, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT. IT TOOK SOME STONES TO LET THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW YOUR SECRET IDEN--
I'LL...UH... TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT, LUKE.
HEY--IS THAT *ANT-MAN* OVER THERE...?
I'M SURPRISED YOU CAME, REED. I MEAN, AFTER T'CHALLA REJECTED YOUR LITTLE *OVERTURE*, I FIGURED--
PLEASE, SUE. THIS ISN'T THE TIME OR PLACE.
GEEZ, GUYS. CAN'T WE JUST TAKE A TIME-OUT?
I'M *SO* HAPPY FOR STORM. SHE SEEMS *SO* HAPPY. I MEAN--
DO TRY TO CONTAIN YOURSELF, KATHERINE.
I WONDER WHAT THIS WILL MEAN FOR HER OBLIGATIONS AS AN X-MAN?
HOW ABOUT YA JUST RELAX AND ENJOY THE CEREMONY FIRST, CYKE?

MEANWHILE, THE PSYCHIC PARASITE KNOWN AS THE CANNIBAL PREPARES HIS TRAP...
OH, THE TEMPTATION. SO MANY *POWERFUL HOSTS* FOR ME TO INHABIT.
NO, STICK TO THE PLAN. KISS THE BRIDE... AND WAKANDA IS YOURS!
'SCUSE ME FOLKS, COMIN' THROUGH.
IS THAT--?
T'CHALLA, YOU ARE THE MAN...

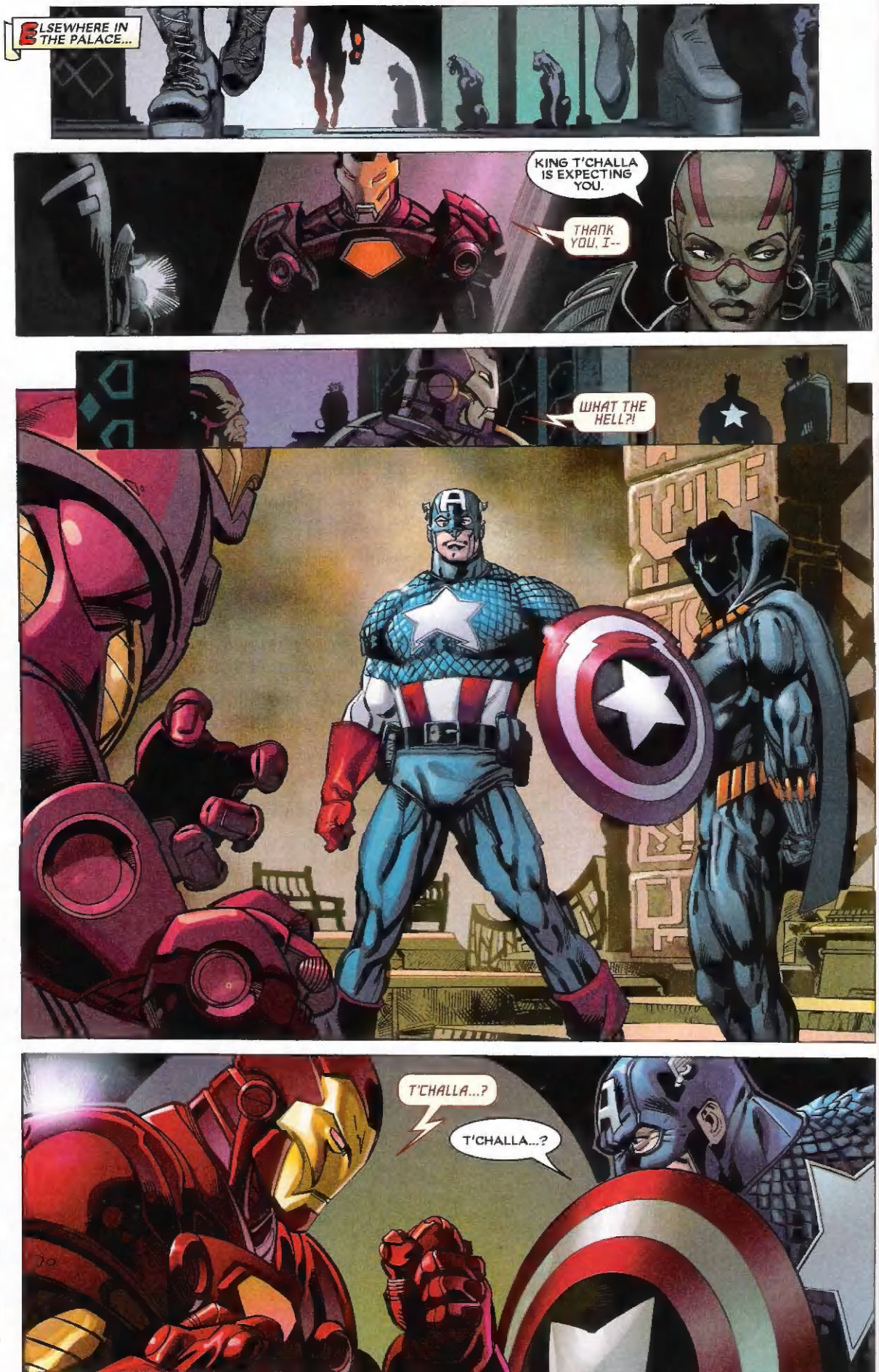
WAITAMINUTE. IS THAT WHO I THINK IT IS?
WHAT? WHO?
HE'S, UH...WELL, HE'S KINDA THE FIRST ME.
LONG STORY.
HIS NAME IS ISAIAH BRADLEY. TO HEAR HIS STORY, SEE *TRUTH: RED, WHITE & BLACK, TRUE BELIEVER.* -EDITOR


ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE...
SINCE MY MOTHER IS THE HIGHEST-RANKING ELDER BESIDES MYSELF, SHE WILL PERFORM THE CEREMONY.
WHATEVER MAKES YOU HAPPY, DEAR.
THIS IS NOT ABOUT WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY, ORORO.
AFTER I PASSED A SERIES OF INITIATIONS TO BECOME THE LEADER OF THE BLACK PANTHER CULT, THERE WAS ONE FINAL TEST.
MY SOUL WAS TRANSPORTED TO THE CELESTIAL PLANE, WHERE I CAME FACE-TO-SNOUT WITH A COSMIC ENTITY WITH THE POWER TO UTTERLY DESTROY ME.
THE PANTHER GOD.

BUT I'M NOT BECOMING A "BLACK PANTHER."
NO. BUT YOU ARE ABOUT TO BECOME MY BRIDE. YOU WILL BE JUDGED AS A SOULMATE AND AS A BEARER OF FUTURE GENERATIONS OF--
ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT WE COULD NOT GET MARRIED? THAT IF THE "PANTHER GOD" LOOKS UNFAVORABLY ON ME... THEN WHAT I FEEL FOR YOU...MEANS NOTHING?
OF COURSE NOT.
IN A WORST-CASE SCENARIO, THE PANTHER GOD COULD CONSUME YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL, BUT THAT'S PRETTY UNLIKELY.
YOU'RE NOT JOKING.
NO.
THIS RITUAL IS A CENTRAL TENET OF THE PANTHER CULT. IT IS ONE OF THE REASONS WE HAVE REMAINED STRONG OVER THE CENTURIES. WOULD YOU WANT ME TO RESIGN MY TITLE OF KING OVER THIS? DOES IT SCARE YOU?
NOTHING SCARES ME.
BUT UNDERSTAND. IF--AND I MEAN IF-- I WERE NOT TO PASS THE PANTHER GOD'S TEST, I WOULD WANT YOU TO RESIGN AND BE WITH ME.
THEN YOU AGREE TO THE RITUAL.
YOU DIDN'T ANSWER MY QUESTION.
YOU FIRST.
KNOK KNOK
WHO--?
AH. RIGHT ON TIME.

PROFESSOR XAVIER...?
SO GLAD YOU COULD COME, CHARLES.
WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD, T'CHALLA.
I'LL GIVE YOU TWO A MOMENT.
YOU...
...CAN WALK?
LONG STORY.
ISN'T IT ALWAYS?
BUT LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU.

ORORO, I'M AS PROUD AS ANY FATHER COULD BE TODAY. YOU FINALLY HAVE THE MAN YOU LOVE. THE MAN YOU *DESERVE*.
THIS IS A MOMENTOUS UNION...
...AND THERE'S NO ONE ELSE MORE SUITED FOR THE ROLE YOU'RE ABOUT TO PLAY.
WHAT ROLE IS *THAT*, PROFESSOR?
ORORO, YOU HAVE BEEN A PRINCESS, A GODDESS, AND AN X-MAN. BUT THE POSITION YOU ARE ABOUT TO ASSUME TRUMPS EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE BEFORE. *EVERYTHING*.
YOUR MARRIAGE TO T'CHALLA REPRESENTS THE *HIGHEST-PROFILE* UNION IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COEXISTENCE ON THIS PLANET.
AS OF TODAY, ORORO, YOU ARE THE MOST *IMPORTANT* MUTANT IN THE WORLD. AS THE QUEEN OF WAKANDA, YOU WILL BE THE *LIVING SYMBOL* OF HUMAN/MUTANT RELATIONS.
IT'S A ROLE YOU WERE *BORN* TO PLAY.


ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE...
KING T'CHALLA IS EXPECTING YOU.
THANK YOU, I--
WHAT THE HELL?!
T'CHALLA...?
T'CHALLA...?

MEANWHILE...
DON'T GET ME WRONG, IT'S GREAT TO HAVE MY BROTHER'S SPIRIT AROUND, BUT HE WON'T SHUT UP ABOUT--
WHOA. DID YOU [redacted] THAT?
YES. A POWERFUL PRESENCE HAS ARRIVED. THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO WILL DISCERN THE SOURCE.
WELL, IF IT AIN'T OPRAH, IT MUST BE HIM.
WHO'S THAT?
ACCORDING TO THE GUIDEBOOK HERE, IT'S THE WATCHER.
FRIEND OF THE BRIDE OR GROOM?
ACTUALLY, HE SHOWS UP WITH A COSMIC EVENT IS ABOUT TO OCCUR.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? IS GALACTUS SHOWING UP NEXT?
WHAT DO YA THINK HE'S DOING HERE, STRETCHO?
WE CAN ONLY ASK HIM.
HE'S NOT EXACTLY A CHATTERBOX, IS HE? MORE THE STRONG SILENT TYPE.
LIKE ME... BUT NOT AS HANDSOME.

STAND DOWN. BOTH OF YOU. PLEASE.
I AM CALLING ON YOU--
--TWO OF MY OLDEST AND DEAREST FRIENDS--
--TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NEUTRAL GROUND THAT WAKANDA PROVIDES. LET THE SPIRIT OF THE DAY REKINDLE FRIENDSHIPS THAT ARE DEEPER THAN WHATEVER DIFFERENCES SEPARATE US.
I AM NOT HERE TO DEBATE POLICY. I AM HERE AS A FRIEND AND A FORMER AVENGER ASKING YOU TO CONSIDER THIS:
TOGETHER, WE HAVE DEFEATED INTERSTELLAR FOES. DON'T LET A PIECE OF PAPER BE OUR DOWNFALL.
IT'S NOT A PIECE OF PAPER WE'RE DISPUTING, PANTHER-- IT'S PRINCIPLE. PRINCIPLES OUR NATION WAS FOUNDED UPON. PRINCIPLES I'VE FOUGHT SIXTY YEARS TO DEFEND!

THIS IS ABOUT LAW, STEVE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE. A LAW THAT'S OUR BEST CHANCE OF AVOIDING ANOTHER STAMFORD.
A LAW THAT YOU'RE BREAKING.
REGISTRATION PREVENTS CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR.
IT'S CALLED PROFILING, TONY, AND IT'S A SLIPPERY SLOPE. I WON'T HAVE ANY PART OF IT.
NO, STEVE, IT'S CALLED REGULATION. LIKE GUN CONTROL, THE SUPER HERO REGISTRATION ACT SERVES THE GREATER GOOD.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIVES, TONY. BEING GIFTED ISN'T A CRIME. IT DOESN'T MAKE YOU A THREAT.
TELL THAT TO THE PARENTS AT STAMFORD.

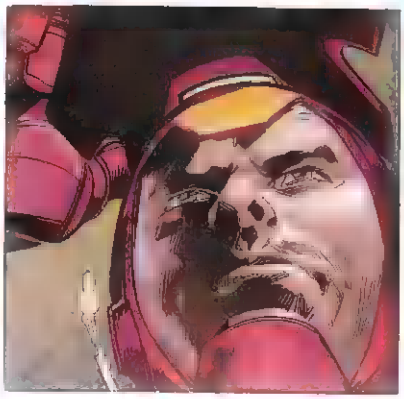
T'CHALLA, PLEASE GIVE MY APOLOGIES TO ORORO. TELL HER I WANTED TO BE HERE.
CAP, WAIT...

I WISH THE TWO OF YOU HAD *TRIED* TO--
T'CHALLA, I KNOW YOUR INTENTIONS WERE PURE, BUT THIS WAS A MISTAKE.

I RESPECT WAKANDA'S NEUTRALITY IN THIS WAR. FOR THAT REASON, I'M ABIDING THE PRESENCE OF KNOWN FUGITIVES. BUT WHAT'S TAKING PLACE HERE TODAY...

...YOU'RE GOING TO BE NAVIGATING A POLITICAL MINEFIELD FOR YEARS TO COME. YOUR ENEMIES WILL SEIZE ON THE OPPORTUNITIES YOU'VE PROVIDED.

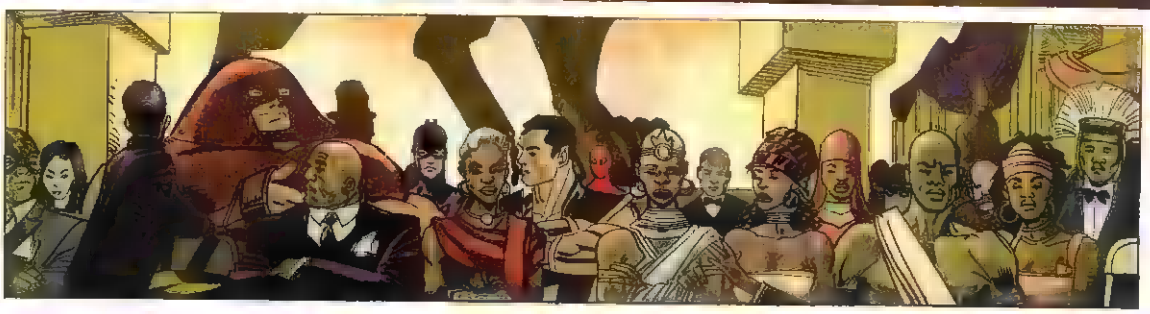
AND YOU, TONY?
ARE YOU MY *FRIEND?*



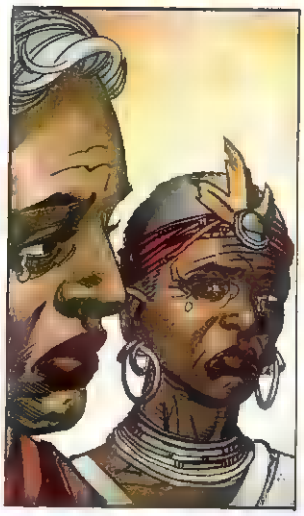
T'CHALLA, YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, WE HAVE HISTORY. BUT HEAR *ME* NOW--
DON'T MEDDLE IN *THINGS* THAT DON'T CONCERN YOU.

TONY, I'VE LISTENED TO YOU. NOW LISTEN TO *ME:*
THIS *CANCER* THAT IS EATING AWAY AT THE SOUL OF YOUR COUNTRY, IT HAS NO HOME HERE.
AM *I* CLEAR?
CRYSTAL.
GIVE MY REGARDS TO ORORO. TELL HER I'M SORRY I COULDN'T STAY.
WELL, *THAT* WENT WELL...

WAKANDA IS THE PLACE TO BE TODAY. LOOK WHO'S SHOWING UP--
BET
PRESIDENT BUSH!
FIDEL CASTRO!
NELSON MANDELA!
WHO'S THAT CHEERING FOR?
OPRAH JUST ARRIVED.
OKAY, IT'S OFFICIAL. OPRAH IS THE MOST POPULAR PERSON ON EARTH!
LET ME ESCORT YOU TO YOUR SEATS. THE CEREMONY WILL BE STARTING SOON.
CAN YOU BELIEVE WE ARE HERE IN WAKANDA! IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE!
AND LOOK AT ALL THE SHOT-CALLERS HERE FOR OUR GRANDBABY'S WEDDING!
WHY IS THE PRESIDENT HERE? YOU KNOW HE DON'T GIVE A--
HUSH! THE BLACK PANTHER IS A *HEAD OF STATE!* HE HAS TO INVITE EVERYONE.
IF IT WERE *MY* COUNTRY, I'D SAY GET ON 'FORE YOU GET SPIT ON. BUT THAT'S JUST ME.
WELL, IT'S NOT YOUR COUNTRY.
HERE YOU ARE--
--WITH THE REST OF MS. MUNROE'S FAMILY.



BEEN A LONG TIME.
YES.
WE BOTH LOST BABIES.



WE ALL HAVE CRIED ENOUGH OVER THE PAST. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE THE FUTURE.

YES INDEED.

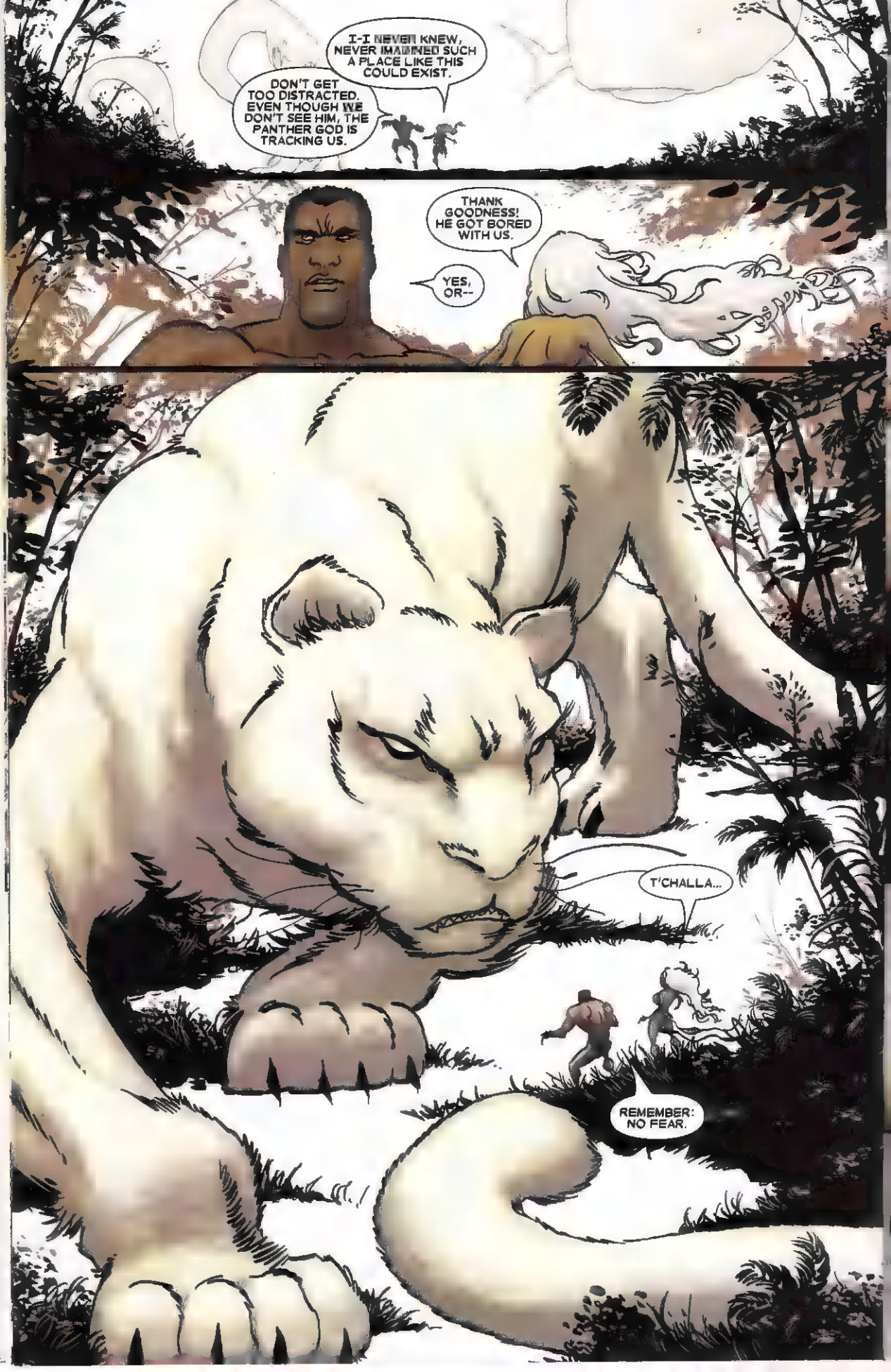
STRANGE. WHY WOULD *HE* BE HERE...?
PERHAPS HE KNOWS WAKANDANS GIVE THE BEST PARTIES!
C'MON SON, YOU HAVE TO RELAX. IT'S A BLESSED DAY. *THAT'S* WHY THE WATCHER ■ HERE.
I *DON'T* THINK THAT QUALIFIES AS A REASON FOR THE WATCHER TO APPEAR.
WHY *NOT?* TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE ON EARTH ARE ABOUT TO FORM A *PERFECT UNION.* I TRULY BELIEVE THIS MARRIAGE WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.
AND DON'T EVEN GET ME STARTED ON THE CHILDREN. EVEN REED RICHARDS' KIDS WILL HAVE TO--
HEY! MAYBE *THAT'S* WHY HE IS HERE. WHAT HAVE YOU TWO BEEN UP TO? IS YOUR BRIDE--
NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, UNCLE.
WELL, JUST KNOW YOUR FATHER IS VERY HAPPY TODAY. I FEEL HIS PRESENCE STRONGLY.
DON'T...
LET'S DO THIS.

WHERE IS YOUR LOVELY BRIDE?
I DON'T KNOW. DID YOU SCARE HER OFF?
OH. THERE SHE IS.

LIEBERSTESH.
DITTO, LITTLE BUDDY.

HELLO.
HELLO.
WORRIED?
NEVER.
REMEMBER: I LOVE YOU. YOUR FAMILIES LOVE YOU. YOUR FRIENDS LOVE YOU. YOU LOVE EACH OTHER.
THAT LOVE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR EACH OTHER, FOR YOUR FAMILY, FOR YOUR COUNTRY. YOU ARE FORMING THE FOUNDATION OF A NATION, A NATION THAT WILL BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF ALL NATIONS IN TIMES TO COME. ARE YOU READY?
YES.
YOU STAND IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE *PANTHER* AND WE WILL SEE WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.

WHERE ARE WE?
THE SPIRIT WORLD.
ROOOOAAAARRRRRR
THE APE GOD!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME I CAN'T--?
YOUR SPECIAL POWERS ARE WITH YOUR BODY. WE ARE JUST ESSENCE HERE.
WHICH MEANS?
WHICH MEANS RUN!


I-I NEVER KNEW, NEVER IMAGINED SUCH A PLACE LIKE THIS COULD EXIST.
DON'T GET TOO DISTRACTED. EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T SEE HIM, THE PANTHER GOD IS TRACKING US.
THANK GOODNESS! HE GOT BORED WITH US.
YES, OR--
T'CHALLA...
REMEMBER: NO FEAR.

T'CHALLA-- WHO IS THIS YOU [redacted] BEFORE ME?
MY BRIDE.
BRIDE? THIS MORTAL WHO CLAIMS DIVINITY? THE BRIDE OF A PANTHER?
DON'T HOLD HER ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHAT OTHERS CLAIM HER TO BE. I LOVE HER, AND I NEED HER TO FULFILL MY DESTINY.
STEP ASIDE.
I WILL JUDGE WHAT SHE REALLY IS.

SNIFF SNIFF
SNUFFLE
I HAVE MADE MY JUDGMENT.
WELCOME, ORORO MUNROE.

OH!
NGGH!
BACK ALREADY?
FIVE SECONDS. TIME MOVES DIFFERENTLY THERE.
I PRESUME ALL WENT WELL?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WE'VE BEEN GONE--
IT WAS ACTUALLY... KIND OF WONDERFUL.
THE PANTHER GOD HAS BLESSED THIS COUPLE. PITY ANYONE WHO WOULD STAND IN THE PATH OF THEIR HAPPINESS.
NOW LET US CELEBRATE THEIR LOVE!

LATER...
BEST PARTY EVER!
PRINCE WOULD PLAY A WEDDING RECEPTION?
THAT'S ODD.
WHAT?
THAT MAN... OVER THERE... HE IS MORE THAN HE APPEARS TO
I'VE BEEN SPOTTED BY THE LYRICS.
I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
SISTER-IN-LAW! IT'S OFFICIAL!
I'LL ADMIT IT, I WAS A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT MY BROTHER MARRYING SOMEONE I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW...
...BUT YOU ARE AWESOME! THAT ENTRANCE? YOU KILLED IT!
KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED.
OVER HERE!

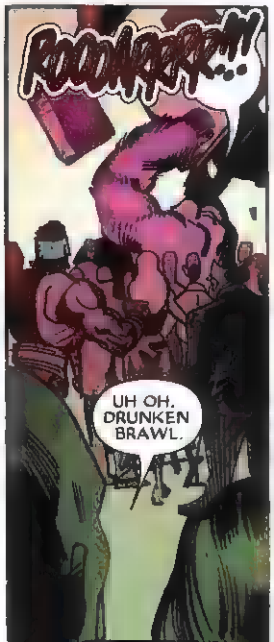
WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW.
GUY JUST KEELED OVER. STRANGEST THING.
HE'S *ABANDONED* HIS HOST. HE COULD BE *ANYWHERE*.
ANYONE.
YOU KNOW, T'CHALLA SAID WE ARE WELCOME TO STAY IN WAKANDA AS LONG AS WE WANT...
...WE COULD FORGET AMERICA AND THIS WHOLE REGISTRATION THING, JESSICA. WE COULD RAISE OUR KID HERE, WHERE NO ONE IS GONNA GIVE HER HELL ABOUT BEING BLACK, OR HAVING POWERS--
NOT JUST US. FALCON, PHOTON... WHOEVER WANTS TO BE DOWN!
WAITAMINUTE, ARE YOU *SERIOUSLY* TALKING ABOUT US *REMAINING* EXPATRIATES AND MOVING TO WAKANDA?
OKAY, YOU'VE BEEN ON THIS "BLACK AVENGERS" THING SINCE NEW ORLEANS, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO LET IT GO.
WHOA! DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE, BIG FELLA!
SPIDER-MAN.
MAN-APE.
WHOSE SIDE--BRIDE OR GROOM?

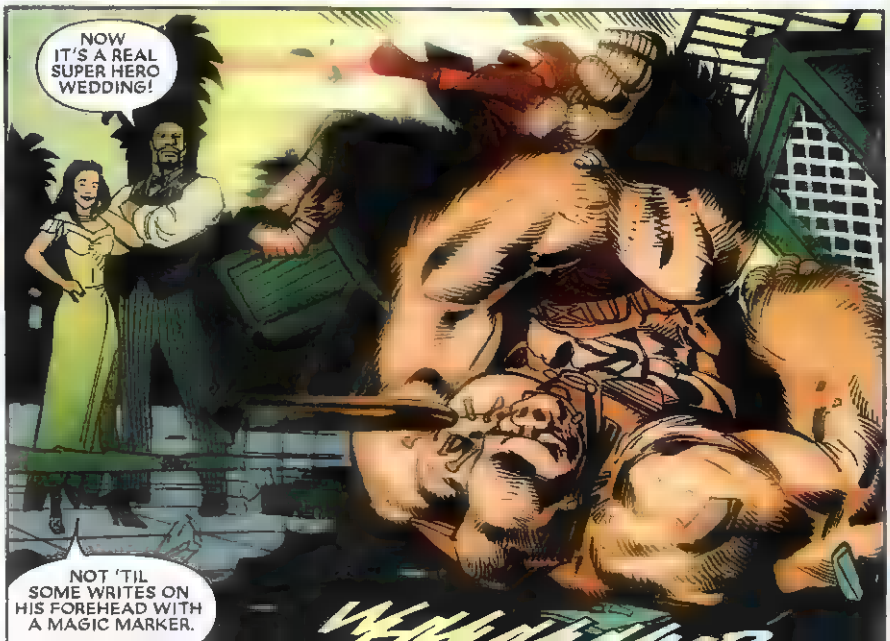
BOTH.
I CAME HERE TO WREAK REVENGE FOR NOT BEING INVITED. TO DEMAND RESPECT FOR OUR TRIBE. THEN, WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE BORDER... THEY SAID MY NAME *WAS* ON THE LIST.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THERE *WAS* A LIST.

WHATCHA DRINKING THERE, MAN-APE?
SCOTCH.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD STOP.

Y'KNOW, IF YOU'RE HAVING RESPECT PROBLEMS, MAYBE CALLING YOURSELF "MAN-APE" AND WALKING AROUND IN A WHITE RUG IS SOMETHING YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER.
ARE YOU *DISRESPECTING* MY TRIBE?
SLOW DOWN, BIG GUY. ALL I'M SAYING IS, I KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT NAMING YOURSELF AFTER AN UNPOPULAR ANIMAL. YOU MIGHT WANT TO SWITCH IT OUT TO SOMETHING WITH MORE MAINSTREAM APPEAL--LIKE A LION OR TIGER OR SOMETHING.

YOU *ARE* DISRESPECTING THE MAN-APE!
THE MAN-APE WILL *SQUASH* YOU!
÷*SIGH*÷ CAN'T WE GET THROUGH JUST *ONE* OF THESE THINGS WITHOUT FISTICUFFS?

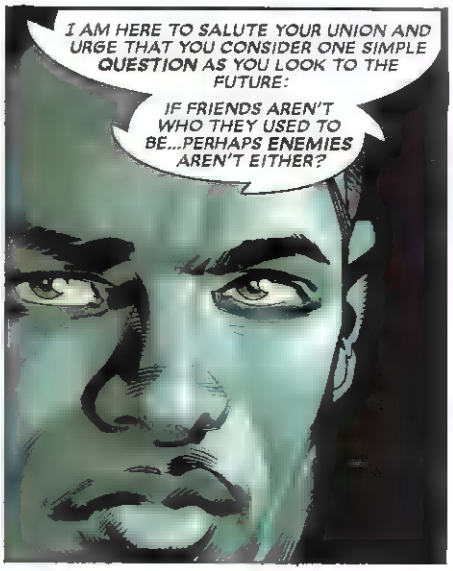

KOOOKRRRCH!!
UH OH. DRUNKEN BRAWL.


NOW IT'S A REAL SUPER HERO WEDDING!
NOT 'TIL SOME WRITES ON HIS FOREHEAD WITH A MAGIC MARKER.

FEW HOURS LATER...
FINAL CRYSTAL
All My Love Kitty
BEYOND CORPORATION
OKAY...
YOU CAN OPEN THIS ONE.
THE SEAL OF LATVERIA. THERE IS NO NEED FOR CONCERN. EVERYTHING'S BEEN CAREFULLY SCREENED.
GREETINGS, KING T'CHALLA, QUEEN ORORO.
WHILE I DIDN'T GET AN INVITATION TO TODAY'S BLESSED EVENT, I TAKE NO OFFENSE. CONSIDERING I HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN HELL FOR SOME TIME, IT WAS FAIR TO PRESUME I WAS UNAVAILABLE.

THIS IS NOT A THREAT, OR A TRAP, OR ANYTHING YOU MIGHT HAVE COME TO EXPECT FROM ME. QUITE THE OPPOSITE, IN FACT.
I AM HERE TO GIVE YOU MY HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS AND SOME HUMBLE ADVICE.

TODAY EVERYTHING CHANGES FOR YOU... AND FOR WAKANDA. YOUR BLESSED UNION REPRESENTS AN UNPRECEDENTED STEP WHOSE CURRENTS WILL BE FELT BY THE WORLD COMMUNITY.
TRADITIONAL GEOPOLITICAL ALLIANCES ARE SHIFTING RADICALLY. OLD FRIENDSHIPS ARE CRUMBLING. THE WORLD IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A MUCH MORE...UNPREDICTABLE PLACE TO LIVE.


I AM HERE TO SALUTE YOUR UNION AND URGE THAT YOU CONSIDER ONE SIMPLE QUESTION AS YOU LOOK TO THE FUTURE:
IF FRIENDS AREN'T WHO THEY USED TO BE...PERHAPS ENEMIES AREN'T EITHER?

IF YOU WOULD AT LEAST CONSIDER A CONVERSATION, IT MIGHT BE WORTH A LOT TO BOTH OF US. MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN.

SO. LATVERIA FOR THE HONEYMOON?
NOT FUNNY.
NO. NONE OF IT IS.
BUT THOSE ARE TROUBLES FOR ANOTHER DAY.
NEXT:
WORLD TOUR, PART ONE
HOLIDAY IN LATVERIA

BRIDE OF THE PANTHER
Part 5

"HERE COME A STORM"

Reginald Hudlin, Writer
Scot Eaton, Pencils
Klaus Janson, Inks
Dean White, Colors
Kaare Andrews, Pages 21-24
VC's Randy Gentile, Letters
Frank Cho, Cover
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Marvel would like to give special thanks to the following people for the design of Storm's wedding gown: Procter & Gamble, CBS Daytime, Alan Locher, Ellen Wheeler, Maria Aguero, Alyson Hui, and Shawn Dudley.

DIVINING THE DESIGN...

by Jim McCann

Many months ago, when we at Marvel knew the Black Panther was going to pop the question, we knew that we had our work cut out for us. I mean, this wasn't just any wedding, this would be a royal wedding! The guest list would need to be scrutinized, seating arrangements delicately balanced, and security tightened. After all, we are in the middle of a Civil War! However, before any of that could be addressed, we knew we had an even bigger challenge: we had to get a dress!

Who could be worthy of dressing one of our most revered characters? Storm is not only the most recognizable female character, but one of the most stylish and savvy women at Marvel. So, we called up our friends at CBS Daytime and the wonderful Maria Aguero had just the man for the challenge. Shawn Dudley, Costume Designer for *Guiding Light*, has designed dresses for heroes, villains, and divas, so who better to dress a mutant goddess?

So, what exactly goes into designing a dress for the Wedding of the Century? A lot, it seems. A few weeks ago, our pals at Comic Book Resources sat down with Shawn to discuss his process. At that point in time, the dress was designed and Frank Cho worked off that design to draw the cover to *Black Panther* #18. What follows is that interview.

STORM'S GUIDING LIGHT: SHAWN DUDLEY REVEALS DESIGNER SECRETS

by Arune Singh, *Staff Writer, Comic Book Resources*

It's no secret that the wedding of Storm and the Black Panther is quite unusual for Marvel Comics. Fans have debated the merits of the relationship, with some feeling each character has "better" suitors, but there's no doubt that this union is at the very least something with many storytelling possibilities. The union occurs in July's "Black Panther" #18, but Marvel and TV Guide recently unveiled the wedding dress to be worn by the famous member of the X-Men (and portrayed by Halle Berry in the films), designed by daytime drama Costume Designer Shawn Dudley. Dudley's work on CBS' "Guiding Light" has earned him many accolades, so along with Alyson Hui, his associate designer, he was happy to tackle this iconic comic book character. CBR News recently spoke with Dudley via phone at his New York offices, in between his search for the perfect outfit to compliment the popular Tom Pelphry, who plays Jonathan Randall, on "Guiding Light."

Shawn, thanks for taking the time to talk with us. So how did you get involved with the wedding of Black Panther & Storm?

The initiative started at Marvel, since they wanted to do a promotional with an outside source, to design the basic look for this wedding dress, whether it was from a top notch wedding designer like Vera Wang or whomever. Marvel eventually narrowed it down to where it was more a costume idea — they didn't want a traditional Western style wedding dress design. They had contacts at ABC and CBS, and asked costume designers to come up with initial design ideas. We seemed to have taken the design concept to where Marvel wanted it and did some in-depth research, came up with the concept, explored the traditions of this kind of wedding and voila, we got the job.

So then what inspired the look of the dress?

We had to do a lot of research because, and I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, I only knew Storm from the big splashy Hollywood movie, so I needed to get in there and find out who Storm was in her comic world. We approached design the same way we approach any design, namely to get inside the character because they have a life, and the dress needs to reflect that. We were not going to design just any dress for Storm: it had to be appropriate for her. We really had to go back and explore the different periods in her story. There's some periods with her hair pulled back, another where she came back from Japan looking very edgy and street. She tends to reflect the journey she's on. Also, this is set as a royal wedding and we wanted the dress to seem appropriately regal. We also went in and did research on different

tribal aspects and symbolism, because the writer really wanted to play up the fact that it is going to be set in Africa. Black Panther has his history with Africa and Storm has her history with Africa. We needed

to mix all of that in, along with our additional research. We also turned to various fashion designers from Thierry Mugler, Vivenne Westwood, and vintage Gianni Versace. These were fashion designers who used exaggerated lines and proportions and that unique quality that embodied what we were going for with Storm's dress. We also looked at vintage designs from Erte and the Hollywood costume designer, Adrian. We also designed a beautiful ceremonial cape that she will wear for entrance that hasn't been seen yet. The cape has a gold handpainted and beaded design using African kente cloth and mud cloth design. She makes her grand entrance and the cape is removed to show the wedding gown underneath.

In the press release, you mentioned that the comic differed from your actual design.

[laughs]

Could you explain the differences?

We designed something that was more in keeping with our classic design technique. We paint our renderings in watercolors and it just creates a very different feeling for the dress, as opposed to the artists rendering for the comic book. Our lines are softer, body features aren't quite as exaggerated, and it's just much more in that theatrical style rendering that we're used to. That was the hard part, wrapping our heads around the fact that this wasn't a garment to be produced into a real garment, so it wouldn't be a fully realized project, and we tried to keep in mind how the artists in the comic book world create movement and fabrics. We wanted to make sure that we gave them enough elements to get those looks. We knew she would walk, and possibly fly, and we wanted to make sure those elements were in the costume. We also tried to work in her mother's ruby, and mentioned it to the Marvel guys, but she had lost it somewhere down the road, but they were able to make it so that the ruby comes back to her. When I saw the final version, by Frank Cho, I was a little surprised [laughs] to see it and compare the two. She's much sexier and has a little more bust action going on in the comic book, and I understand it, but I can't go that far with it, because it's not my nature as a designer. It

someone else, but I'm happy with what he did with it.

So is it safe to assume you were a fan of comics as a kid? You seem to understand the storytelling language.

Oh yeah. I was really more into those weird, kind of scary horror comics from the sixties and seventies. Those were my favorites and I had so many hand-me-downs from my uncle. They creeped me out... but I loved it. I also had some of the classic Disney comics, and kept track of Spider-Man. In New Mexico, where I used to live, the Albuquerque Journal used to run Spider-Man everyday and my grandmother would dutifully cut it out everyday and once a month I'd get a packet of comics she'd cut out for me.

Did you try to work on the film?

No, that's L.A, a whole

different world, but my dream job was *Lord of The Rings*. I almost did go for it. But I found out that they were in production in New Zealand and I would have dropped everything in my life to go work there. I'm one of those

Lord Of The Rings fanatics. I still have my original copies that I first read when I was 13.

Uh oh [laughs]

I even designed those costumes in college, when I studied design.

Did they look like the film's costumes?

They were close. There's an iconic look to many of the characters, so it's hard not to be similar.

Now we know that soap fans and comic fans are equally intense -- and equally vocal. But both mediums, for lack of a better term, are in a certain amount of decline from their glory days. Looking at both industries, how do you think they can increase viewership?

I think they can do it, but there needs to be a real understanding of the contemporary audience. The attention span is much shorter and I think that affects soaps and comics: if you've got a long running storyline, then the audience needs faster resolution and something new all the time. I don't think they're willing to invest that kind of time into the storyline. You see these younger people — I don't want to say kids, but they sort of are — are always looking forward to the next thing, from the iPod to the X-Box, it's the new generation that gets them excited. They get excited about a brand and we have to address that brand issue. I don't know as much about comics as I do about soaps, but we shy away from contemporary storytelling and things because we think the audience wants that...but the audience is leaving us. There's so much violence, peer pressure, status objects...all so much more apparent now. I'm generation X and I think there's a bigger generation gap than ever before, which we need to address, since people in their twenties are so much savvier than we expect. We underestimate them.

Well, we don't underestimate you — so will you be doing more comic book work?

If they ask me, I'd love to. It allows me to be creative in ways that I can't be on the show.

DESIGN IN MOTION

Once the dress had been designed and used by Frank Cho, it was time for interior artist Scot Eaton to put that design in motion. I recently sat down with Shawn once more to show him the final result: Storm's "walk" down the aisle. The moment had arrived! So, how did it all come together? Read on, True Believer!

Shawn, once again, thank you for doing this!

Not at all a problem! It's been great!

Ok, so moment of truth. Here it is, Storm in the gown, "in action" as it were. First reaction?

My first reaction was to laugh. But I laughed in a good way prised to see the transformation and almost final product. I'm amazed to see this design come to life in a way that's very different than what I usually do. I usually see the design through to the end on a live person. I've been able to touch and feel and work with a costume in person. In this form we had to really suspend disbelief and visualize the design on paper and through the beautiful artwork on the page. I think it looks pretty cool.

Now that you've had a chance to see it in four-color, do you think it works the way you envisioned it?

I do think that it mostly works the way I and my assistant, Alyson, envisioned it. We knew that subtle changes would happen as the design was interpreted by each artist. I had to really sit back and force myself to not get involved. And that's really hard for me to do. Its our design, so we're a little possessive. As I look at it though, I'm very pleased with the final

Wonderful! I'm glad we did your design justice! You designed the cape for dramatic effect; what do you think about how it was used in the comic?

I think the cape works from what I can tell. My intention for the cape was to be a presentational moment. When Storm first appears at the wedding ceremony, we first see her in this full ceremonial cape befitting the royal aspect of the wedding. She removes it to than reveal her gown and the wedding ceremony begins. But I do love the movement in the cape and the sweep of the panels.

Aside from Storm's dress, what's your favorite costume you've ever designed?

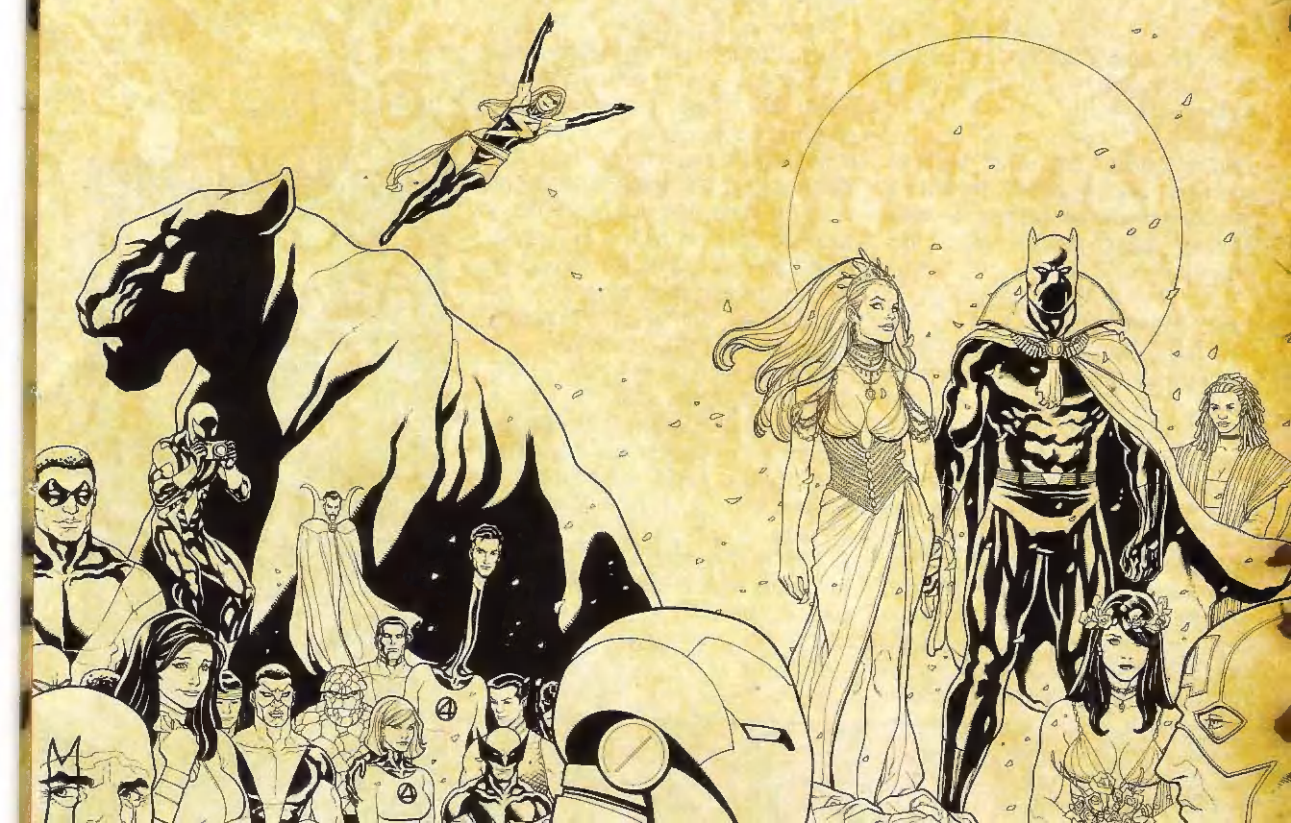
I don't know that I have one favorite costume that I've designed. I learned an interesting lesson back in the day as a theatre design student and that was we should never be fully satisfied with our designs...there's always something more that we could have done or achieved. And when that day comes when we are satisfied with our design, then that's the day it's over. As designers and artists, we should always be learning something new and striving for perfection and looking for that new way to help tell the story.

Great advice! Any final thoughts?

Final thoughts? Yes...I'm just glad to have had the chance to collaborate on a very unique and challenging project. The type of project that really pushes us to think outside the box.

Well, we are thankful for the time and energy! Here's hoping we get to work together again soon!

So, there you have it. From concept to design to wedding day--everything it takes to dress a goddess! As you can tell, it's quite an undertaking! Here's hoping this is the last wedding for a while. Wait, I'm getting a call... What's that? WHO is having a baby? Wow! The fans are going to be shocked! Ok, thanks for the heads up. Hmmm... I wonder if Shawn can design baby clothes...



MAIL TO THE KING!

Hello, Panther Fans! Daniel Ketchum, the all-new, all-different Assistant Editor on BLACK PANTHER here. I'll be picking up where Mr. Sedlmeier left off, bringing you the latest from your fellow readers and the occasional Latverian tyrant. Let's go to it!

G'Day Guys,

Hail King T'Challa and the soon to be Queen Ororo! (Sigh!) Isn't love grand? What an amazing issue Black Panther #15 was. Fantastic artwork and superb writing of my man Reggie Hudlin. I must admit, I've been away from the Marvel Universe for a couple years, but it was this forthcoming storyline that has brought me back to the fold, and for that, I truly am grateful. It's definitely been a long time coming for Ororo and T'Challa, and who knows, they may overtake Reed and Sue Richards as Marvel's premier power couple. (Or is that title currently owned by Cyclops and the White Queen? Heh heh!)

Anyway, can't wait for the big day. Of course, I mean T'Challa's bachelor party, heh heh!

So, thanks to you, the Panther Crew, for making this event happen.

Long may they reign!

Cheers,
Tony K.
Sydney, Australia

P.S. My money's on Shadowcat to be the chief bridesmaid and Luke Cage to be the best man.

Thanks much, Tony. Glad to have you back! (And hopefully, there's no question of who constitutes Marvel's premier power couple after this issue!)

Hudlin, Eaton & Co.,

Princess Zanda?!?! I was eight years old when Jack Kirby's BLACK PANTHER comic books hit newsstands (old school, right?). His "King Solomon's Frog" storyline, which featured Princess Zanda, are sentimental favorites in my collection. So it was a real treat to see Zanda's appearance in BLACK PANTHER #16; one that catapulted me grinning back into yesteryear. Thanks for that. Coupled with the appearances by the Avengers, the X-Men, the S.H.I.E.L.D., the Fantastic Four and—best of all—Storm's long-lost family, it was a clever introduction that increased momentum towards the event we're all waiting for: the Wedding Royale.

As an (obviously) longtime comic book reader, I can honestly say that I've looked forward to the matching up of Storm and the Black Panther almost as much as I once looked forward to the match-up between Muhammad Ali and the Man of Steel. Keep it old school!

Best,
Paco Taylor

P.S. High-fives to Eaton, Janson & White for making the pages of BLACK PANTHER (and each other) look so good.

Paco—I, too, enjoy it when comics conjure up memories of the good old days. I'm glad that you enjoyed Princess Zanda's cameo!

Mail to the King,

As an African and a member of its diaspora, I just wanted to congratulate you for the way you incorporated the political aspect of the Black Panther's life. T'Challa is indeed an embodiment of how many wish Africa would be, and how kids should dream to transform it. Please maintain the political spectrum, it's realistic as far as international relations are concerned.

As far as the Black Panther, as a leader, I think Hudlin is doing a very good job, as a super hero, I can only plead: "Give him more powers." I think granting him super-powers would only fit within the changes happening in *Civil War* and how his nation will respond to it. The latter leads me to wonder, if Wakanda does not ratify a Super hero Registration Act, does that mean that the resistance has a safe haven?

Finally, the Storm/Panther wedding, as skeptical as I was—good job.

As a suggestion, if I may, I really think T'Challa needs a definite nemesis, not only one that threatens his country, but one with whom he has a personal beef, one that would be recognized as a villain throughout the entire Marvel Universe.

Should none of this happen, I'll be even more eager to see what Hudlin will come up with.

Thanks,
Regis Zoula

Hey, Regis—Hopefully this very comic addresses some of your questions about Wakanda's involvement in Civil War. And as for a nemesis, keep your eyes peeled...you never know who might pick a fight with the Panther. Doom did show up in this issue, and he's most definitely recognized as a villain throughout the Marvel Universe!

Mr. Reggie Hudlin,

You really made me happy with what you're doing with the comic so far. When I looked at what's coming up on the Marvel website, I'm so excited about the next coming issues. Keep up the incredible work you and your team is doing. Peace!!!

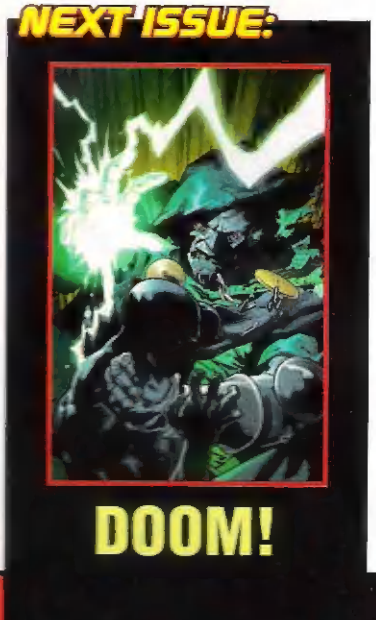
Christopher Smith
Jacksonville, Florida

Thanks for the nice note, Christopher! What's to come is very exciting indeed...

Next month, King T'Challa and Queen Ororo hit the road in the name of diplomacy. Their first stop: Latveria! (Who knew Doom's playground would be the number one super hero honeymoon destination?)

See you in thirty!
--Daniel

Daniel Ketchum



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